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South Edition ★

Mayflower families finally united

By Robert D. McFadden
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It was just a romantic legend, based on real people who landed aboard the Mayflower at Plymouth in 1620. But as generations of Americans have learned, Myles Standish, a captain who could brave cannon fire but not the eyes of a woman, sent his trusted lieutenant, John Alden, with his marriage proposal to Priscilla Mullens, who answered, "Why don't you speak for yourself, John?"

The tale, created by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in his 1858 poem, "The Courtship of Miles Standish," had an apparently happy

ending: John and Priscilla were married (as they were in reality, and had 11 children), while Standish, after a fit of irrational rage, became a magnanimous loser and went on to become the hero of Plymouth Colony.

It all might have ended there.

But Saturday, some 377 years and 14 or more generations after Priscilla rejected Standish and they went their separate ways, descendants of the two finally got it together: Caroline Hannaford Pillsbury, a Standish descendant, and Andrew Oliver II, who traces his lineage to Priscilla and John Alden, were married at the Episcopal Church of the Ascension and St. Agnes in Washington.

"The historical-literary connection is fun and interesting, but it was not the decisive factor in our getting together," Oliver said last night from an undisclosed locale in the Caribbean where he and his new wife, 26, a third-year law student at Columbia University, are spending a 10-day honeymoon. "The decisive factor," he added, "was love."

Oliver, 27, an articles editor for the National Review in New York, said that, unlike Standish, he had used no intermediary to propose marriage, and added: "She accepted right away, much to my relief."

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This time the answer was yes

■ MARRY

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Meantime, the couple's parents, and Mrs. Philip Winston Pillsbury Jr. and and Mrs. Daniel Oliver, both of Washington, were sharing champagne at the Pillsbury home last night and talking about the strange links of history and literature in the lives of two Mayflower families.

"Other people think of these events as history or as literature, but we think of them as family matters," the groom's father, who was chairman of the Federal Trade Commission from 1986 to 1989, said in a telephone interview in which the members of both families got on a speakerphone.

They recalled that Caroline, who attended the Hotchkiss School and graduated magna cum laude from Brown University, and Drew, as the groom is known, who graduated from Harvard University, met in the spring of 1995 at a costume party in New York — she went as Lauren Bacall and he as Tom Wolfe — and they quickly hit it off.

Both were aware of their Mayflower ancestry, said Pillsbury, a retired senior Foreign Service officer with

the U.S. Information Agency, but as he put it, "Most young people don't go around talking about their ancestors," and it was not until later, after they got to know one another, that they realized the connection.

Caroline was a descendant of Myles Standish, an English-born soldier who became the military adviser to the Pilgrims in the Netherlands, sailed with them on the Mayflower in 1620, became their captain at Plymouth, was unanimously chosen captain of the colony and in later years served as assistant to the governor and treasurer of the colony.

And Drew was a descendant of Priscilla Mullens, the daughter of one of the signers of the Mayflower Compact, and John Alden, one of the Pilgrim Fathers, who is said to have been the first to step on Plymouth Rock. They married — the date is variously given as 1621 or 1623 — and according to William Bradford's history of the colony, the couple had 11 children.

Alden was an official of the colony for more than 50 years and was said to have outlived all the original signers of the Mayflower Compact.

"My mother was the one who descended from Myles Standish,"

Pillsbury said, explaining the difference in names. And Oliver said his father's mother's family lineage led directly to Priscilla Mullens and John Alden.

The couple also discovered other ancestral notables. Caroline's included William Pillsbury, who arrived in the village of Boston in 1640; Charles A. Pillsbury, a founder of Pillsbury Co. in Minneapolis, and her grandfather, Philip W. Pillsbury, who was chairman of Pillsbury Co. from 1951 to 1965.

Drew's ancestors included Thomas Oliver, who arrived in Boston in 1632; Thomas Hutchinson, who was the last governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and his lieutenant governor, Andrew Oliver.

While Longfellow's romantic tale might seem to have dictated another course, Drew proposed to Caroline without an intermediary, under a Florida moon in March of last year, and was promptly accepted. As preparations for the wedding went forward, Drew's parents were unaware of Caroline's ancestral link to Standish, and her parents knew nothing of Drew's lineage to Priscilla and John Alden.

It was not until a few weeks ago, when the families began putting together information for the wedding announcement that they realized the extraordinary connections of the couple to the famous characters in Longfellow's poem and their real-life counterparts in the Plymouth Colony.

After the wedding, at which the Rev. Lane Davenport officiated, a reception was held at Anderson House, home of the Society of the Cincinnati, an organization to which Pillsbury belongs. The society was founded by George Washington, and membership is limited to firstborn descendants of firstborn descendants of officers who served in the Revolutionary War.

The groom's mother, Louise Oliver, a trustee of the Lawrenceville School in Lawrenceville, N.J., and a governor of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University, said, "It's great — the two families really like each other!"

As for the lengthy and prosy "Courtship of Miles Standish," Oliver said it was good, but added that "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere," another Longfellow poem, was "a little easier to get through."